



Qatar

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Qatar, an Arab state on the Persian Gulf, is a monarchy with no constitution or political parties. It is governed by the ruling Al-Thani family through its head, the Amir. The current Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, took power from his father in June 1995 with the support of leading branches of the Al-Thani family, and in consultation with other leading Qatari families. This transition of authority did not represent a change in the basic governing order. The Amir holds absolute power, the exercise of which is influenced by religious law, consultation with leading citizens, rule by consensus, and the right of any citizen to gain access to the Amir to appeal government decisions. The Amir generally legislates after consultation with leading citizens, an arrangement institutionalized in an appointed advisory council that assists the Amir in formulating policy. In 1999 the Amir convened a constitutional committee to draft a permanent constitution that would provide for parliamentary elections. The committee has met regularly and is projected to complete its recommendations by 2002. In March 1999, citizens participated in the free and fair election of a national body, the Central Municipal Council, for the first time. The judiciary is nominally independent, but judges hold their positions at the Government's pleasure.

The country has efficient police and security services. The civilian security force, controlled by the Interior Ministry, consists of two sections: The police and the General Administration of Public Security. An independent state security investigative unit (Mubahith) which reports directly to the Amiri Diwan (the office of the Amir), performs internal security investigations, gathers intelligence, and is responsible for sedition and espionage cases. There also is an independent civilian intelligence service (Mukhabarat), which also reports directly to the Amiri Diwan.

The population of the country is approximately 650,000, of whom 170,000 are believed to be citizens. The State owns most basic industries and services, but the retail and construction industries are in private hands. Oil is the principal natural resource, but the country's extensive natural gas resources play an increasingly important role. The per capita gross domestic product of citizens is \$28,792. Rapid development in the 1970's and 1980's created an economy in which foreign workers, mostly South Asian and Arab, outnumber citizens by a ratio of 3 to 1. The Government has embarked on a program of "Qatarization," which is aimed at reducing the number of foreign workers. Many government jobs are offered only to citizens and private sector businesses are encouraged to recruit citizens as well.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, its record was poor in some areas, particularly regarding citizens' right to change their government and the treatment of foreign workers. Citizens do not have the right to change their government peacefully. The Government severely limits the rights of assembly and association. The Government restricts freedom of religion although it continued to take some steps to ease restrictions on the practice of non-Muslim religions. Women's rights are restricted by law and social customs. Women have the right to vote. The Government severely restricts workers' rights. Domestic servants are mistreated and at times abused. Noncitizens, who make up more than 75 percent of the residents of the country, face discrimination in the workplace. The country also is a destination for trafficked persons.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits torture, and unlike in the previous year, there were no allegations of torture by security forces. There were unconfirmed allegations in previous years that some of the defendants in the trial of the 1996 coup plotters (see Sections 1.d. and 1.e.) had been tortured while in police custody; government officials have denied the allegations. The Government administers most corporal punishment prescribed by Islamic law but does not allow amputation. Punishments are not administered publicly.

The International Committee of the Red Cross visited prisons in 2000; no other organization has requested to visit the prisons. Prison conditions generally meet international standards. Women are held separately from men, and juveniles are held separately from adults. Pretrial detainees are held separately from convicted prisoners.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the police have the discretion to arrest persons based on minimal suspicion. There were no reports of arbitrary detention in security cases, as had been the case in the past. The authorities generally charge suspects within 48 hours. Suspects usually are presented to the Attorney General within 24 hours of arrest. The Attorney General decides whether to hold the suspect up to a maximum of 4 days, after which time the suspect is presented before a judge, who may order the suspect released or remanded to custody to await trial. Judges may extend pretrial detention for 1 week at a time to allow the authorities to conduct investigations or order the release of the suspect through bail. Lengthy pretrial detention is not known to occur. The accused is entitled to legal representation throughout the process. There are no provisions for making legal counsel available to indigents at state expense. Suspects who are detained in security cases are generally afforded access to counsel; however, they may be detained indefinitely while under investigation. There were no cases of incommunicado detention during the year.

In March former Ministry of Education official Abdulrahman Al Nuaimi, who had been imprisoned since 1998 after publicly criticizing the Amir for purportedly anti-Islamic actions, was pardoned by the Amir and released.

In May the Appeals Court upheld the guilty verdicts and sentenced to death 19 of those convicted of involvement in a February 1996 coup attempt, including prime suspect Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. The final decision to carry out or commute the executions rests with the Amir. The Amir had not made a decision by year's end, and the 19 remain in prison. The remaining 14 suspects' sentences of life imprisonment were upheld.

The law does not address forced exile and in the past the Government has used forced exile; however, there were no reported cases of forced exile during the year.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The judiciary is nominally independent; however, most judges are foreign nationals who hold residence permits granted by the civil authorities, and thus hold their positions at the Government's pleasure. The number of citizen judges is increasing. The Amir appoints all judges for renewable 3-year terms.

Responsibility for the judiciary is shared among the bureaucracies of three ministries. Adlea (Civil Law) Courts are subordinate to the Ministry of Justice, Shari'a (Islamic law) courts fall under the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, and Prosecutors fall under the Ministry of Interior.

There are two types of courts. The Adlea courts have jurisdiction in commercial, national security, all forms of trafficking (including drugs, contraband, and persons), and criminal matters. The Shari'a courts have jurisdiction in family, inheritance, deportation, wrongful injury, and most other civil cases. The law provides for the establishment of ad hoc state security courts. Although there have been no cases before these courts since the current Amir assumed power, they have not been abolished formally by law and remain an option. Defendants tried by all courts have the right to appeal. The Appeals Court is the highest in the country.

The Shari'a courts apply most principles contained in the draft Family Status Law, which covers marriage, inheritance, and juvenile matters, to cases currently under adjudication. Some provisions of the legislation continue to be debated. Shari'a trials usually are brief. Shari'a family law trials often are held without counsel; however, an increasing number of litigants, especially women, use lawyers to present their cases. After both parties have stated their cases and examined witnesses, judges usually deliver a verdict after a short deliberation.

Criminal cases normally are tried within 2 to 3 months after suspects are detained. Suspects are entitled to bail, except in cases of violent crime. Citizens or noncitizens may provide bail. Foreigners who are charged with minor crimes may be released to a citizen sponsor. They are prohibited from departing the country until the case is resolved. Defendants in the civil courts have the right to be represented by defense attorneys.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in family, commercial, and civil cases. Trials in both the Adlea and the Shari'a courts are public, but the presiding judge can close the courtroom to the public if the case is deemed sensitive. Lawyers in the past did not play a formal role except to prepare litigants for their cases; however, an increasing number of litigants avail themselves of a lawyer to present their cases, particularly in divorce cases. In such cases, lawyers prepare the litigants and speak for them during the hearing. Non-Arabic speakers are provided with interpreters. Defendants are entitled to legal representation throughout the trial and pretrial process.

Foreigners are disadvantaged, especially in cases involving the performance of contracts. However, provided that the foreign defendant's sponsor or embassy agrees, the defendant is entitled to legal representation throughout the trial and pretrial process.

Defendants appear before a judge for a preliminary hearing within 4 days of their arrest. Judges may extend pretrial detention for 1 week at a time to allow the authorities to conduct investigations. Lengthy pretrial detention is not known to occur.

After a public trial of persons arrested for involvement in the 1996 coup attempt, trial judges sentenced 33 defendants to life imprisonment in 2000. Nine of them were tried in absentia. Another 85 defendants were acquitted on all charges. In May the Appeals Court upheld the guilty verdicts and sentenced to death 19 of the 33 convicted; the Amir had not made a decision by year's end whether to carry out or commute the death sentences (see Section 1.d.).

There were no known political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respects these prohibitions in practice. Traditional attitudes of respect for the sanctity of the home and the privacy of women provide a great deal of protection against arbitrary intrusion for citizens and residents; there is no distinction between citizens and noncitizens. A warrant must be obtained before police may search a residence or business, except in cases involving national security or emergencies. Judicial authorities issue search warrants. There were no reports of unauthorized searches of homes during the year. The police and security forces are believed to monitor the telephone calls of suspected criminals, of those considered to be security risks, and of selected foreigners.

Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners and to apply for residence permits or citizenship for their spouses; such permission generally is granted.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law does not provide for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government imposes some restrictions on these rights in practice. The Government in 1995 lifted formal censorship of the media, although some restrictions still remain.

Citizens express many of their views freely and in public. Although sensitive political and religious questions are off-limits, for many citizens there is little fear of government monitoring of their speech; however, the larger noncitizen population does not enjoy the same latitude and does not express itself freely and publicly. Louay Abdulla, a noncitizen employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was sentenced in March to 2 years in prison for insulting the Amir by creating a Web site the Government considered offensive. An appeals court upheld

the sentence in June. He was pardoned in December.

There are five daily newspapers, three in Arabic and two in English; none are state-owned, but the owners or board members of newspapers generally are either high-level government officials or have ties to government officials. Copies of foreign newspapers and magazines are censored for explicit sexual content. The law provides for criminal penalties and jail sentences for libel. All cases involving the media fall under the jurisdiction of the criminal courts. Journalists continue to practice self-censorship due to social and political pressures when reporting on government policies, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states. The Government in 2000 reportedly subjected some journalists to pressure after they published articles critical of the Government.

Although personal criticism of government officials is rare, the performance of ministries is the subject of extensive reporting. The Ministry of Education was criticized for poor management of school facilities and for not following through with needed reforms. Members of the elected Municipal Council also have publicly criticized the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for bureaucratic inefficiencies. During the year, the Ministry of Education sued one Arabic-language newspaper for a critical report regarding poor maintenance at public schools. The case was pending at year's end.

The Ministry of Information was abolished in 1996, and the Censorship Office was moved to the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation. The Office reviews materials for pornography, sexually explicit material, and material deemed hostile to Islam. There were no reports of political censorship of foreign news media or foreign programs. Customs officials screen imported print media, videocassettes, and similar items for pornography, but no longer block the personal importation of non-Islamic religious items (see section 2.c.).

State-owned television and radio reflect government views, but the private satellite television network, Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel (JSC), operates freely. Although it is privately owned, since its inception, some of Al-Jazeera's operating costs have been paid by the Government. Al-Jazeera's programs are internationally oriented and generally do not cover local news. Callers to a popular morning radio show frequently discuss topics such as government inefficiency and the lack of responsiveness by various ministries to citizens' needs, for example, poor schools, weak infrastructure, problems at the university, and road repairs. A growing number of citizens and residents have access to the Internet, which is provided through the privatized telecommunications monopoly. During the year, its rates were lowered by approximately 30 percent, encouraging greater use of the Internet. Internet service is censored for pornographic content through a proxy server, which blocks Web sites containing certain key words and phrases. A user who believes that a site is censored mistakenly may submit the web address to have the site reviewed for suitability. The Government is responsive to such submissions. Web sites are monitored for political or religious content. Material considered insulting to Islam (including pornography) is censored.

There is no legal provision or tradition of academic freedom, and instructors at the University of Qatar exercise self-censorship.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law does not provide for the freedom of assembly, and the Government severely limits it in practice. The Government generally does not allow political demonstrations; however, it permitted a peaceful demonstration of about 1,500 participants in August under the aegis of the Central Municipal Council to protest the Israeli Government's actions against Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Another anti-Israeli demonstration of about 3,000 was authorized in October 2000. The Government also permitted peaceful demonstration against the World Trade Organization in November.

The law does not provide for freedom of association, and the Government severely limits it in practice. The Government does not allow political parties or membership in international professional organizations critical of the Government or of any other Arab government. Private social, sports, trade, professional, and cultural societies must be registered with the Government; registration of such groups is routinely granted. Security forces monitor the activities of such groups.

c. Freedom of Religion

There is no legal protection for freedom of religion, and the Government officially prohibits public worship by non-Muslims; however, it permits and protects private religious services that have received prior authorization. The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the conservative Wahhabi order of the Sunni branch. While Shi'a Muslims practice most aspects of their faith freely, they do not organize traditional Shi'a ceremonies or perform rites such as self-flagellation.

The Government and ruling family are linked inextricably to Islam. The Minister of Islamic Affairs controls the construction of mosques, the administration of clerical affairs, and Islamic education. The Amir participates in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods, and personally finances the Hajj journeys of poor pilgrims who cannot afford to travel to Mecca.

The Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox churches received de facto official recognition in the latter part of 1999, when the Government made a verbal commitment to allow the churches to operate without interference. The Government has respected this commitment in practice, but it had not granted these churches formal recognition by year's end. The Government does not recognize any other religions, officially or unofficially. It does not maintain an official approved register of religious congregations.

The Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican churches operate openly, and the Anglican Church, with its ties to preindependence British influence, has bank accounts in its name. However, the lack of formal government recognition limits their ability to obtain trade licenses, sponsor clergy, or, for Catholic and Orthodox churches, to open bank accounts in the name of the church.

During the year, the Catholic Church developed plans and raised funds to begin construction of a church. The church building is to be located on a portion of the site reserved by the Government for the Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox communities. However, fundraising problems have delayed the other congregations in completing their plans. The Government has voiced concerns that a rapid pace of progress may provoke opposition among more conservative citizens.

Non-Muslims may not proselytize, and the Government officially prohibits public worship by non-Muslims. However, it does permit and protect private services. Converting from Islam is considered apostasy, and is technically a capital offense; however, there is no record of an execution for such a crime since 1971.

Non-Muslim religious services must be authorized in advance by the Government. Although traffic police may direct cars at these services, the congregations may not publicly advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses. Some services, particularly those on Easter and Christmas, can draw more than 1,300 worshippers.

The Government does not permit Hindus, Buddhists, or other polytheistic religions to operate as freely as Christian congregations. (The Koran does not specifically enjoin toleration for such religions.) However, there is no official effort to harass or hamper adherents of these faiths in the private practice or their religion. There are no reliable estimates of the number of non-Muslims in the country.

The Government formally prohibits the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature; however, in practice individuals generally are not prevented from importing Bibles and other religious items for personal use. In previous years, there were sporadic reports of confiscation of such materials by customs officials; however, during the year, Christian worship groups reported having no trouble importing religious instructional materials (for example, Sunday school materials and devotionals) for their use. In addition, religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter are available readily in local shops. However, such materials are not available in Arabic.

Islamic instruction is compulsory in public schools. While there are no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attend secular private schools.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in commercial or civil cases.

The legal system follows Shari'a law in matters of inheritance and child custody. Muslims have the automatic right to inherit from their spouses; however non-Muslim spouses (invariably wives, since Muslim women cannot legally marry non-Muslims) do not inherit unless their spouse formally wills them a portion (up to one third of the total) of their estates. In cases of divorce, young children usually remain with the mother, whatever her religion. However, the Government will not allow noncitizen parents, even if they have custody of their children, to take them out of the country without the permission of the citizen parent, which effectively discriminates against non-Muslim parents.

d. Freedom of Movement within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respects them in practice, with some notable exceptions. There are no restrictions on internal travel, except around sensitive military and oil installations. In general, women do not require permission from male guardians to travel. However, men may prevent female

relatives and children from leaving the country by providing their names to immigration officers at ports of departure. Technically, women employed by the Government must obtain official permission to travel abroad when requesting leave, but the extent to which this regulation is enforced is not known. Citizens critical of the Government sometimes face restrictions on their right to travel abroad.

All citizens have the right to return. Foreigners are subject to immigration restrictions designed to control the size of the local labor force. Foreign workers must have the permission of their sponsor employer to enter and depart the country (see Sections 6.c. and 6.d.), but their dependents may leave the country without restriction. Foreign women who are married to citizens are granted residence permits and may apply for citizenship; however, they are expected to relinquish their foreign citizenship.

The Government has not formulated a formal policy regarding refugees, asylees, or first asylum. Those attempting to enter the country illegally, including persons seeking asylum from nearby countries, are refused entry. Asylum seekers who are able to obtain local sponsorship or employment are allowed to enter and may remain as long as they are employed.

The issue of the provision of first asylum did not arise during the year. There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

Citizens do not have the right to change their government or the political system peacefully. The political institutions combine the characteristics of a traditional Bedouin tribal state and a modern bureaucracy. Under the amended Provisional Constitution, the Amir must be chosen from and by the adult males of the Al-Thani family. The Government does not permit political parties or organized opposition groups.

The Amir exercises most executive and legislative powers, including appointment of cabinet members. In 1999 citizens elected a 29-member Central Municipal Council. For the first time, men and women age 18 and older were permitted both to vote and to run as candidates in free and fair elections. The Council is a nonpartisan body that addresses local issues such as street repair, green space, trash collection, and public works projects. Its role is to advise the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture. The Council does not have the authority to change policy.

In November 1998, the Amir announced the formation of a committee to draft a permanent constitution that would provide for parliamentary elections. The constitutional committee was inaugurated in July 1999 and includes 36 government officials, academics, and prominent business leaders. In addition to subcommittees on the legislature, executive, and judiciary, it includes a subcommittee on human rights. The committee has met regularly and is expected to complete a draft constitution by mid-2002.

The percentage of women in government or politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population. Impediments that prevent or hinder women from participating in politics include lack of experience and role models, and the traditional society, in which women are expected to be mothers and caretakers.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

The Government does not permit local human rights organizations to exist.

No international human rights organizations are known to have requested to investigate conditions in the country. However, Amnesty International and foreign embassies were invited to send observers to sessions of the public trial of those accused in the 1996 coup attempt. Foreign observers attended the trial sessions held during the year.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The law prohibits discrimination in the workplace; however, institutional, cultural, and legal discrimination based on gender, race, religion, social status, and disability exists.

Women

According to a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) on family issues, domestic violence against women

occurs, but is not widespread. According to Shari'a, all forms of physical abuse are illegal. The maximum penalty for rape is death. Shari'a provides for no punishment for spousal rape. The police investigate reports of violence against women. In the past few years, the Government has demonstrated an increased willingness to make arrests in cases of domestic violence, whether against citizens or foreigners. However, offenders who are citizens usually received lighter punishments than do foreigners. There were no arrests or convictions for domestic violence during the year.

Employers mistreated some foreign domestic servants, especially those from South Asia and the Philippines. In most cases, the mistreatment involved nonpayment or late payment of wages, but also included rape and physical abuse (see Section 6.e.). Foreign embassies provide shelter for maids who have left their employers as a result of abuse or disputes. Abused domestic servants usually do not press charges for fear of losing their jobs.

The legal system allows leniency for a man found guilty of committing a "crime of honor," a euphemism that refers to a violent assault against a woman for perceived immodesty or defiant behavior; however, such honor killings are rare.

The activities of women are restricted closely both by law and tradition. For example, a woman is prohibited from applying for a driver's license unless she has permission from a male guardian. This restriction does not apply to noncitizen women. The Government adheres to Shari'a as practiced in the country in matters of inheritance and child custody. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands. However, they inherit only one-half as much as male relatives. Non-Muslim wives inherit nothing, unless a special exception is arranged. In cases of divorce, Shari'a is followed; younger children remain with the mother and older children with the father. Both parents retain permanent rights of visitation. However, local authorities do not allow a noncitizen parent to take his or her child out of the country without permission of the citizen parent. Women may attend court proceedings but generally are represented by a male relative; however, women may represent themselves. According to Shari'a, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but the courts routinely interpret this on a case-by-case basis. A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim; however, many make a personal decision to do so. A noncitizen woman is not required to become a citizen upon marriage to a citizen. Children born to a Muslim father are considered to be Muslim.

Women largely are relegated to the roles of mother and homemaker, but some women are now finding jobs in education, medicine, and the news media. Professional opportunities for women are increasing. Many serve as senior professionals in government service, education, health, and private business. Women make up almost 40 percent of the workforce. The Government has publicly encouraged women to work and is a leading employer of women, who constitute approximately 45 percent of the government workforce, and include university professors, public school teachers, and police. Women appear to receive equal pay for equal work; however, they often do not receive equal allowances. These allowances generally cover transportation and housing costs. During the year, a nongovernmental working committee was established to make recommendations on how the Government could provide housing allowances for female government employees, in particular single women, who currently do not receive any housing benefits.

Although women legally are able to travel abroad alone (see Section 2.d.), tradition and social pressures cause most to travel with male escorts. There also have been complaints that citizen husbands take their foreign spouses' passports and, without prior approval, turn them in for Qatari citizenship documents. The husbands then inform their wives that the wives have lost their former citizenship. In other cases, foreign wives report being forbidden by their husbands or in-laws to visit or to contact foreign embassies.

The Government actively supports women's education. Females constitute approximately two-thirds of the student body at Qatar University. Increasingly women receive government scholarships to pursue degrees at foreign universities.

A draft Family Status Law covering marriage, inheritance, divorce, and child custody is under review by the Ministry of Justice, after which it will be submitted to the Advisory Council and the Cabinet. Women have actively participated in drafting the law by forming committees, organizing and chairing public meetings and discussions, actively provoking debates on the issues, and publicizing the draft law.

There is no independent women's rights organization, nor has the Government permitted the establishment of one. One NGO seeks to improve the status of women and the family under both civil and Islamic law. This NGO is run entirely by women, and focuses on the health and education of, and provision of assistance to, women and children, particularly the poor.

Children

The Government demonstrates its commitment to citizens' children's rights through a well-funded, free public education system (elementary through university) and a complete medical protection program. Education is compulsory for citizens (both boys and girls) through the age of 18. On October 29, the Amir issued a decree making education through primary school (the equivalent of 9th grade) compulsory and free for all noncitizen resident children. Medical coverage for noncitizen children is limited.

Very young children, usually of African or South Asian origin, are used as jockeys in camel races (see Sections 6.d. and 6.f.).

There is no societal pattern of abuse of children.

The Supreme Council for Family Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, set up a hotline called the Friendly Line for use by children. The system allows both citizen and noncitizen children to call in with questions and concerns ranging from school, health, and psychological problems to concerns about sexual harassment.

Persons with Disabilities

The law does not address the question of discrimination against persons with disabilities. The Government has not enacted legislation or otherwise mandated provision of accessibility for persons with disabilities, who also face societal discrimination. The Government maintains a hospital and schools that provide high-quality, free services to persons, including noncitizens, with mental and physical disabilities.

Religious Minorities

Shi'a Muslims fill many positions in the bureaucracy and are prominent in business. However, they experience discrimination in employment in some sensitive areas, such as security. Non-Muslims are not known to face governmental or societal discrimination or violence.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The Government discriminates based on nationality in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services. Noncitizens do not receive the same benefits as citizens. They must pay for health care, electricity, water, and education (services that are provided free of charge to citizens) and are not permitted to own property. The largest nationality groups among noncitizens are Indian, Pakistani, and Iranian nationals, and Arab nationals of other countries. In the private sector, many citizens of Iranian origin occupy some of the highest positions.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The right of association is limited strictly. The law prohibits all workers, including foreigners, from forming labor unions. The law provides for the establishment of joint consultative committees composed of representatives of the employer and workers. The committees do not discuss wages but consider issues such as organization, productivity, conditions of employment, training of workers, and safety measures and their implementation.

The law provides most workers with the right to strike, but only after their particular grievance has been ruled on by the Labor Department of the Ministry of Civil Service. Employers may close a place of work or dismiss employees once the Department has heard a complaint. The Department widely is perceived to be objective, particularly with regard to the most common complaints of foreign workers--the nonpayment of wages and poor living conditions.

The right to strike does not exist for government employees, domestic servants, or members of the employer's family. No worker in a public utility, health, or security service may strike if it would harm the public or lead to property damage.

The press actively reports on the increasing number of labor actions and grievances by foreign workers. The frequency of such strikes is steadily increasing. There was an average of two to three strikes per month during the year, usually in front of the Labor Department. Most strikes are held in protest of the nonpayment of wages and poor living conditions.

Since 1995 the country has been suspended from the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) insurance programs because of the Government's lack of compliance with internationally recognized worker rights standards.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Workers are prohibited from engaging in collective bargaining. Wages are set unilaterally by employers without government involvement. Local courts handle disputes between workers and employers; however, foreign workers tend to avoid drawing attention to their problems with their employers for fear of being repatriated at the request of their employer.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor; however, foreign workers in some cases were employed under circumstances that constituted forced labor. Three-quarters of the workforce are foreign workers who are dependent on a single employer for residency rights. This leaves them vulnerable to abuse. For example, employers must give consent before exit permits are issued to any foreign employee seeking to leave the country. Some employers temporarily withhold this consent to force foreign employees to work for longer periods than they wish. In extreme cases, employers have deported employees at the end of their contract in order to avoid paying them the lawfully mandated end-of-service bonus. Unskilled workers and domestic servants are particularly vulnerable to nonpayment or late payment of wages. Although it is government policy to assist laborers seeking payment of late salaries due (usually through the Labor Department), small groups of laborers (10 to 20) resorted to illegal work stoppages to force payment of arrears. In one case, 1,500 employees of a local construction company went on strike to force payment of their wages.

The country is a destination for trafficked women and children (see Section 6.f.).

The Government prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, very young boys work as jockeys in camel races (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law provides that minors between the ages of 15 and 18 may be employed with the approval of their parents or guardians, and some children work in small, family-owned businesses. Minors may not work more than 6 hours a day or more than 36 hours a week. Employers must provide the Labor Department with the names and occupations of their minor employees. Employers also must obtain permission from the Ministry of Education to hire a minor. The Department may prohibit the employment of minors in jobs that are judged dangerous to the health, safety, or morals of minors. Child labor occurs. Very young children, usually of African or South Asian background, have been employed as jockeys in camel races (see Section 6.f.).

The law prohibits forced and bonded labor by children and generally enforces this prohibition effectively with respect to citizen children (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no minimum wage, although the law provides the Amir with authority to set one. The average wage provides a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The law prescribes a 48-hour workweek with a 24-hour rest period, although most government offices follow a 36-hours-per-week work schedule. Employees who work more than 48 hours per week, or 36 hours per week during the Muslim month of Ramadan, are entitled to overtime pay. This law is adhered to in government offices and major private sector companies. It is not observed with respect to unskilled laborers and domestic and personal employees, all of whom, with scant exception, are foreigners. Many such workers frequently work 7 days per week, and more than 12 hours per day with few or no holidays, no overtime pay, and no effective way to redress grievances.

The Government has enacted regulations regarding worker safety, but enforcement, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Energy and Industry, is lax. The Department of Public Safety oversees safety training and conditions, and the state-run petroleum company has its own safety standards and procedures. The law lists partial and permanent disabilities for which compensation may be awarded, some connected with handling chemicals and petroleum products or construction injuries. The law does not specifically set rates of payment and compensation. Workers who suffer work-related sickness or injuries receive free medical treatment

provided by the Government. The law does not provide workers specifically the right to remove themselves from hazardous work conditions, and workers often hesitate to remove themselves from hazardous work conditions because of fear of dismissal.

Foreign workers may enter the country on a visitor's visa, but a sponsor then is needed to convert the visitor's visa to a work visa and the worker must have his sponsor's permission to depart the country. The Government also penalizes citizen employers who severely violate residence and sponsorship laws by prohibiting them from importing labor until they rectify the situation. The law provides any worker with the right to seek legal relief from onerous work conditions; however, domestic servants generally do not pursue such relief in order to avoid repatriation. Employers mistreated some foreign domestic servants. Such mistreatment generally involves the nonpayment or late payment of wages; in some cases it involves rape and physical abuse (see Section 5).

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits prostitution and trafficking in persons; however, there were reports that both children and women were trafficked to the country.

Children age 4-15, mostly of African, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi origin, are used as jockeys in camel races. Guardians and handlers, who often pose as parents, bring the children into the country and supervise their training. They live in difficult conditions and train on a daily basis to become riders.

The country also is a destination for trafficked women and girls. Women from East Asia, South Asia, and Africa travel to the country to work as domestic servants and some have reported being forced into domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.

The Government does not investigate or prosecute traffickers actively. The Government repatriates victims of trafficking upon discovering their presence and does not provide assistance to victims. It does not support public awareness campaigns regarding the problem of trafficking of women and girls. A national campaign to set the minimum age of 15 and minimum weight of 100 pounds for camel jockeys was undertaken in April. The Supreme Council for Family Affairs claims that it is a top priority, and it is the subject of an ongoing media and public awareness campaign.